

**Report of the  
Board of Regents**

**Long Range Plan**

**National Library of Medicine**

# **Improving Toxicology and Environmental Health Information Services**



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NATIONAL LIBRARY OF MEDICINE**

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# **Improving Toxicology and Environmental Health Information Services**



**U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**  
Public Health Service  
National Institutes of Health

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# Foreword

One of the lessons we seem destined to relearn again and again is that institutions, whether in the public or private sector, must successfully manage change. Unless there is a continuing commitment to renewal, organizations ossify and gradually become irrelevant in the contemporary world. Newspapers report almost daily about organizations that have failed to learn this simple lesson.

Through the adoption of a Long Range Plan in 1987\*, the National Library of Medicine is meeting its commitment to managing change. The Plan is a living document that guides NLM decision-making. It wisely predicted that certain areas would need special attention in the future, and, under the direction of the Board of Regents, the Library subsequently brought together panels to look at outreach and medical imaging.

One of the goals for the Library identified in the 1987 Plan was to review its information services in certain public health areas, namely, those dealing with toxicology and environmental health. A Planning Panel was assembled and instructed by the Board to address these concerns. With this step, the Board initiated a planning process that moved forward with remarkable efficiency and ended with laudable results. The Panel was asked by the Board to address issues such as the near- and long-term needs of various user communities for informa-

tion about toxicology and environmental health; the commonalities and differences for such groups as health care providers, legislators, regulators, scientists, emergency response teams, and the public; the adequacy of existing information resources for present and foreseeable future information needs of these groups; the appropriate focus of NLM's efforts in this area; how NLM might improve access to its information services; and what new opportunities should be addressed by NLM (including opportunities stemming from new scientific discoveries, opportunities that are technology driven, opportunities resulting from the emergence of new classes of users, and opportunities that call for new collaborations with government agencies or other organizations).

The Board, on October 2, 1992, unanimously approved the report for incorporation in the Long Range Plan and applauded the leadership of its Co-Chairs, Edward N. Brandt, Jr., M.D., Ph.D., and Gilbert S. Omenn, M.D., Ph.D., and the hard work of all the members and the involved Library staff. Now begins the challenge—to assemble the resources and to implement the recommendations.

*Lawrence Cohn, M.D.  
Chairman, Board of Regents  
National Library of Medicine*

\*National Library of Medicine, Long range plan; report of the NLM Board of Regents. Bethesda, Md.: National Library of Medicine, January 1987.



# Preface

The publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962 sounded a wake-up call to society, and worldwide concern about the deleterious effects of toxic agents on man and the environment has been increasing ever since.

Scientific inquiries into the nature and seriousness of these effects are growing, and governmental action, particularly in the United States and the other industrialized countries, to identify, prevent or at least alleviate such effects through laws, regulations, and public education are on the upswing. As with any area of science and technology, it is appropriate to examine the information base and the related information dissemination infrastructure that supports these inquiries and activities.

For the last twenty-five years, the National Library of Medicine, through its Toxicology Information Program, has been a leader in making information in toxicology and environmental health available to the professional communities that need it. While these subject areas and the related NLM activities were touched on briefly in the Library's 1987 Long Range Plan, there was not sufficient time then to examine them in detail and make recommendations for relevant NLM initiatives. It was, therefore, appropriate and timely for the Library's Board of Regents to ask that a Panel of Experts be assembled to re-

evaluate the goals, objectives, and scope of NLM's Toxicology Information Program considering current and likely future requirements for information and data in toxicology and environmental health, as well as likely advances for technology for information sciences.

The Panel's analyses, conclusions and recommendations are set forth in this report, which represents much serious discussion and diligent work on the part of the Panel members. We did not reach our conclusions lightly, and we did so in full recognition of the serious fiscal constraints faced by the Federal government. Nevertheless, it is our judgment that the provision of toxicology and environmental health information to a wide variety of users is a timely and important Federal investment. The members of the Panel gave generously of their time and talent, and we thank them on behalf of the Library. We are also grateful to Dr. Donald A.B. Lindberg, the Director of the National Library of Medicine, and to the capable NLM staff who assisted us throughout our deliberations; their good work made our tasks easier.

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*Co-Chairs, NLM Long Range*  
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